

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 SAA-01 SS-15 NSCE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5151
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY RABAT

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 23059

RABAT FOR SAUNDERS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PORG, FR, LE, MOPS, UN
SUBJECT: FRENCH CONCERNS ABOUT THEIR PARTICIPATION IN
UNIFIL

1. IN TALKS WITH UNDER SECRETARY NEWSOM JULY 21,
FRENCH MFA OFFICIALS (SECRETARY GENERAL SOUTOU AND
MIDDLE EAST DIRECTOR LECOMPT) EXPRESSED EXTREME CONCERN
WITH THE DANGEROUS POSITION UNIFIL IS IN. THEY DID
NOT, AS THEY HAVE IN THE PAST, THREATEN TO WITHDRAW
FRENCH TROOPS WHEN THE UNIFIL MANDATE COMES UP FOR RE-
NEWAL IN SEPTEMBER, BUT THEY LEFT THE STRONG IMPRES-
SION THAT SUCH A WITHDRAWAL IS UNDER ACTIVE CONSIDERA-
TION.

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2. THE FRENCH NOTED THAT, WHILE ISRAEL HAS WITHDRAWN
FROM SOUTHERN LEBANON, TWO OF UNIFIL'S MANDATES -- THE
REESTABLISHMENT OF SECURITY AND THE REIMPOSITION OF
LEBANESE AUTHORITY IN THE SOUTH -- HAVE NOT BEEN FUL-
FILLED. THEY SAID THAT UNIFIL HAS BEEN FORCED INTO
THE POSITION OF DOING EVERYTHING IN THE SOUTH, NEGO-
TIATING WITH BOTH PRO- AND ANTI-ARAFAT PALESTINIANS AS

AS WELL AS WITH THE CHRISTIANS. THEY DESCRIBED THE SITUATION AS ABNORMAL AND EXHAUSTING, AND WERE PARTICULARLY CRITICAL OF THE CHRISTIANS. THEY TOLD NEWSOM THEY WERE GIVING SERIOUS THOUGHT TO THE ISSUE OF UNIFIL'S RENEWAL IN SEPTEMBER AND THEY HOPED THE US WAS DOING THE SAME. FRENCH FEAR IS THAT UNIFIL COULD BE PUT INTO A DANGEROUS SITUATION FAR BEYOND ANYTHING ORIGINALLY IMAGINED WHEN THE UN FORCE WAS IMPLANTED.

3. THE FRENCH CONTINUED THAT IT WAS CLEARLY NECESSARY FOR THE US AND OTHERS TO WORK HARD IN BEIRUT TO MAKE THE GOVERNMENT AS STRONG AS POSSIBLE AND IN DAMASCUS TO MODERATE SYRIAN ACTIONS. BUT IT IS ALSO ESSENTIAL FOR THE US TO WORK HARD ON ISRAEL TO CONVINCE IT THAT IT CANNOT EXPECT TO CREATE A "BIZARRE ALLIANCE" WITH THE CHRISTIANS IN SOUTHERN LEBANON. THE FRENCH BELIEVE THAT ISRAELIS HAVE BEEN THE MAJOR GAINERS FROM THE TROUBLES IN LEBANON AND FROM THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF UNIFIL. THEY MUST BE MADE TO UNDERSTAND THAT THEY CANNOT COUNT ON UNIFIL, IN WHICH THE FRENCH OF COURSE PLAY A KEY ROLE, REMAINING.

4. SOUTOU CONCEDED, UNDER NEWSOM'S QUESTIONING, THAT DOMESTIC POLITICAL FACTORS MAY PLAY A ROLE IN THE FRENCH DISQUIETUDE OVER UNIFIL, BUT HE DUCKED NEWSOM'S CONFIDENTIAL

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QUESTION WHETHER THE NEW TROUBLES INVOLVING THE CHRISTIANS SHOULD NOT MAKE CONTINUED UNIFIL PRESENCE MORE IMPERATIVE. NEWSOM ARGUED THAT THE LEBANESE FORCES ARE IN NO CONDITION TO REPLACE UNIFIL NOW AND THAT THE US ATTACHES GREAT IMPORTANCE TO UNIFIL SINCE THE ALTERNATIVES -- PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF THE NEW VIOLENCE -- WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT. SOUTOU CONCEDED NEWSOM'S POINT THAT TO ENCOURAGE THE SYRIANS TO GO SOUTH WOULD BE AN EXTREMELY UNDESIRABLE OPTION.

5. COMMENT: EMBASSY'S IMPRESSION IS THAT THE FRENCH ARE STILL ACTIVELY CONSIDERING ELIMINATION OF THEIR TROOP PRESENCE IN LEBANON, WHICH IS QUITE UNPOPULAR DOMESTICALLY, PARTICULARLY AMONG THE GAULLISTS WHO FORM PART OF GISCARD'S MAJORITY. BUT WE ALSO THINK THAT THE NEW SET OF TROUBLES IN BEIRUT -- FORESHADOWING CHAOS IF UNIFIL IS GUTTED -- WILL MAKE IT HARDER FOR THEM TO WITHDRAW. CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE, THEY ARE LIKELY TO INCREASE PRESSURE ON US TO WORK ON THE ISRAELIS TO SET THINGS RIGHT.
HARTMAN

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